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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Elections in El Salvador

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
7 February 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Elections in El Salvador

Introduction

While instability and political violence still plague many of the larger, more developed republics of Latin America, El Salvador is taking healthy strides toward democratization of its political institutions and more equal distribution of its meager wealth. Extremes of riches for a few and poverty for the majority still exist, but the smallest, most densely populated nation on the hemisphere's mainland has achieved a considerable degree of economic and social development under a decade of relatively progressive military rule. As in much of Latin America, political democracy exists at the sufferance of the military. Nevertheless, the two administrations since the 1961 coup not only have energetically pursued a program of reform, but also have gained a degree of cooperation from the oligarchy, whose political power the military pre-empted.

Salvadorans will decide on 20 February who will be their president for the next five years, and on 12 March they will elect a new congress and new municipal councils for two-year terms. The elections are expected to follow the pattern of relative order and honesty that has been established in the past ten years. The strongest presidential contender is Colonel Arturo Armando Molina, who like his predecessor, is a moderate reformist. His party, the

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governing National Conciliation Party (PCN), is expected to retain its majority in the National Assembly. The second strongest group is the National Opposition Union (UNO), a leftist coalition of Christian Democrats and two mini-parties, one of which is Communist-infiltrated. Of particular concern to the government is the rightist opposition, which, although small, could siphon off some of the government's past conservative support.

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Importance of the 1972 Elections

1. The past decade has seen a gradual strengthening of the country's commitment to political democracy plus considerable social and economic progress. The ideal of responsible elected government, however, is still so young that significant disorders or repression during the coming campaign could nullify these accomplishments. Furthermore, the commitment to popularly elected government has not yet been tested by an opposition victory, and it is unlikely that the military--the country's most powerful political force--is ready to accept such a turn of events.

2. A trend toward social and political reform under the auspices of the military began in 1948 when a group of progressive young officers ousted the reigning military dictator. One of these officers, Major Oscar Osorio, was elected president in 1950. He accomplished few of his reform objectives, however, because of opposition from the wealthy class which had governed--directly or through the military--during most of the country's history. Osorio's successor, a weak and vacillating man was overthrown in October 1960. The junta that followed was soon influenced by Communist elements and was overthrown by another group of young officers three months later. This group was led by Col. Julio Rivera, who was elected President in 1962 using the newly created PCN, the present governing party, as his electoral vehicle.

3. The two PCN administrations--Rivera (1962-67) and Gen. Fidel Sanchez (1967-72)--have instituted the political reforms that gave opposition parties a chance to participate in government, thus increasing their confidence in the electoral process and encouraging political stability. The most important development is the fairness with which elections have been conducted. Despite occasional charges of coercion, some of them undoubtedly true, most observers--including OAS teams and many opposition politicians--agree that El Salvador has taken a giant

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step toward modernizing its political process. In preparation for the approaching election, voters have been re-registered, using a computer to cross-check for potential multiple voters--a prevalent type of fraud in Latin America. Another important innovation was the introduction before the 1964 election of proportional representation for legislative deputies. As a result, since then opposition parties have held a substantial minority in congress, and



President Fidel Sanchez



Former President

Julio Adelberto Rivera

participation in the legislative process has given most parties a constructive attitude toward the government.

4. Presidential elections are held every five years. If no candidate receives a majority of the popular vote, congress chooses between the two front runners. Legislative deputies (elected by proportional representation) and municipal officials (elected by a plurality) are chosen every two years. This year all offices are to be filled.

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The Government's Campaign

5. Molina, the presidential candidate of the governing party, was private secretary to President Sanchez and therefore intimately involved with the policies of the outgoing administration. Molina hit the campaign trail well before his three opponents. He and his running mate, Col. Enrique Mayorga Rivas, had visited more than two thirds of the 261 municipalities by helicopter before the end of December. During these visits he talked extensively with local leaders and spoke at many well-attended public rallies. Molina pledged to continue programs already under way, with special attention to public health, housing, and agricultural problems. Housing needs are particularly great, and agriculture--the mainstay of the economy--is a concern because El Salvador's coffee production exceeds its export quota. Molina has promised to help coffee growers with their problems but recommends increased production of crops other than coffee. He has also come out in favor of redistribution of underused land (but within the legal framework of respect for private property) and has suggested that some agricultural cooperatives might be established. He has stressed administrative reform, allocation of public funds to encourage labor-intensive industries, and restrictions on the political role of the university. His party has accused its rightist opponents of stubbornly resisting change of any kind and has criticized the left for associating with Communists and attempting to discredit the military.



PCN Presidential Candidate

Colonel Arturo Armando Molina

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ELECTION STATISTICS

PARTY	LEGISLATIVE & MUNICIPAL								PRESIDENTIAL		LEGISLATIVE & MUNICIPAL							
	Votes	%	1964 Legis. Seats	Municipal Councils	Votes	%	1966 Legis. Seats	Municipal Councils	1967 Votes	%	Votes	%	1968 Legis. Seats	Municipal Councils	Votes	%	1970 Legis. Seats	Municipal Councils
National Conciliation Party (PCN)	172,058	59.0	32	229	205,267	53.7	31	227	267,447	54.4	212,661	47.0	27	169	315,560	60.0	54	252
Christian Democratic Party (PDC)	75,585	25.9	14	24	120,719	31.2	15	30	106,358	21.6	197,453	43.0	19	83	142,659	27.0	15	8
Renovating Action Party (PAR)	44,202	15.1	6	8	26,128	6.8	4	0	70,978	14.0								
Salvadoran Popular Party (PPS)					9,182	2.4	1	0	47,111	10.0	22,748	6.0	4	9	28,606	5.0	1	0
Republican Party of National Evolution (PREN)					22,947	5.9	1	4										
National Revolutionary Move- ment (MNR)											17,449	4.0	2	0	8,832	2.0	0	0
National Democratic Union Party (PUDN)															32,450	6.0	2	1
TOTAL	291,845	100.0	52	261	383,143	100.0	52	261	491,894	100.0	450,311	100.0	52	261	528,107	100.0	52	261
REGISTERED VOTERS PARTICIPATING	33.4				32.4				39.0		34.0		35.0					

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6. Since its formation, the governing party has polled a clear majority of votes in every election except 1968 (see tabulation). Its support has come mainly from the farms and the military, with some votes from the urban middle class and the oligarchy. It has an effective party structure throughout the country, and its extensive publicity campaign indicates no lack of funds.

The Threat from the Right

7. The newest party in the political equation is the Independent United Democratic Front, which was created by the ultra-conservative Salaverria family of Ahuachapan, El Salvador's westernmost department. The party has a weak organizational base and almost no support outside its home department. Its presidential candidate, General Jose Alberto Medrano, may nevertheless have some personal following among the military, especially the National Guard--of which he is a former director--and in rural areas. His rural support comes from both land-owners and campesinos, the latter through association with an anti-Communist group he founded. Medrano is also trading on his reputation as a hero of the conflict with Honduras in 1969.

8. In his campaign debut on television in December, Medrano was impressive and assured. He calmly outlined a conservative platform of maximum personal liberty and economic growth through private enterprise. Although he is a rabid anti-Communist, his remarks on this topic were restrained.



General Jose Alberto Medrano
FUDI Candidate

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9. Few people are neutral to Medrano; he is either idolized or deeply feared. Among his enemies are many who remember the erratic behavior [redacted]

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[redacted] which caused President Sanchez to dismiss him as head of the National Guard, of a national campesino organization and of the country's national intelligence agency, posts which he held simultaneously. Already signs of friction have appeared in his relations with his running-mate, party president Raul Salaverria. Party propaganda has been scarce since the pre-Christmas kick-off, probably indicating that efforts and campaign funds are being saved for the final weeks before the election.

10. The other conservative party, the Salvadoran Popular Party, draws most of its support from well-to-do industrialists, businessmen, and land-owners. Since it was formed in 1966, it has been the spokesman for conservative interests; few will be deceived by its new slogan, "the party of the working man." It appears to have substantial financial backing and has been flooding the media, particularly radio, with fairly sophisticated propaganda. Its presidential candidate is a well-known attorney, Antonio Rodriguez Porth; in the second spot is Ernesto Guillermo Palomo, a psychiatrist. Both men are effective speakers.

11. The party has no illusions about its chances in the presidential race. Several businessmen in its camp say they will support Molina for the presidency, but will vote for the Popular Party in the legislative election, where its main efforts are being directed.



Antonio Rodriguez Porth
PPS Candidate

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Unity (?) on the Left:

12. For the first time in at least a decade, the parties on the left have managed to put together an electoral coalition. The alliance, called the National Opposition Union, is dominated by the Christian Democrats. Internal friction was evident from the beginning. By including the Communist-infiltrated National Democratic Union Party, the union has probably lost as many votes from moderates as it has gained from leftists. The minuscule National Revolutionary Movement adds little to the coalition's strength.

13. Heading up the coalition's list is the former three-term mayor of San Salvador, Jose Napoleon Duarte, by far the best television speaker among the presidential candidates. His vice-presidential partner is Guillermo Manuel Ungo of the National Revolutionary Movement. In some of his political appearances, Duarte has fiercely attacked the government for imposing an official candidate, for repression, and for "pie-in-the-sky" solutions to the country's problems. In his TV speeches, however, he has presented a well-reasoned critique of government programs, often using official reports as sources.

14. Although the Christian Democratic Party is the country's second largest, having consistently polled between 21 percent and 43 percent of the votes since 1964, Duarte's chances of winning the presidency are slim. The more immediate and realistic



Jose Napoleon Duarte
Candidate of the UNO
Leftist Coalition

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goal of the coalition is to increase left-of-center strength in the legislature, thus gaining more bargaining power in the next administration.

Conclusion:

15. The most likely outcome is a Molina victory, whether by majority vote or in a congressional runoff. Molina's election would mean little change in the policies of the past two governments. Some feel that he might be more progressive and reformist than his predecessors, but that major innovations would run into resistance from the military and the rich.

16. The line-up in congress, a relatively strong and vocal institution by Central American standards, could affect Molina's progress in reforms. His party is not likely to elect the two-thirds majority necessary to give its legislative program clear sailing. In fact, President Sanchez estimates it may lose four or five of its present 34 seats in the 52-seat legislature.

17. As important as the results is the manner in which the campaign and elections are conducted. Some of the opposition attacks on the government--including allegations that it accepted US support for its campaign--have triggered sharp reactions, and the campaign could become more bitter in the remaining weeks. There is no indication, however, that President Sanchez will resort to coercion and electoral fraud, although he recognizes that victory will not come as easily as in past elections.

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